

GLIMPSES OF HENRY CLAY DEAN,
A UNIQUE INDIVIDUAL.

BY J. W. CHENEY.

This remarkable man was a noted Methodist preacher, something of a lawyer, much in demand as a lecturer and political speaker, and in all these roles he was an orator of unusual ability. He was a native of Pennsylvania, but I am unable to say when he was born* or how long he had been preaching when he left that State, but, as my informants agree that he had a family of quite young children when he came to Iowa, he was then probably not far from thirty years old.

I learn from Waring's "History of the Iowa Conference" that he became a member of that body in 1850; that he retired from pastoral work and became simply a "local" preacher in 1856; that he surrendered his certificates of ordination to the conference, and completely severed his connection with the church in 1862. According to Haines' "Makers of Iowa Methodism," he was Chaplain of the United States Senate for a time in Buchanan's administration, which was not while he was in the active ministry, but after he became a local preacher. Politically he was first and for some time a Whig, but, on the disruption of that party and the formation of the Republican party, he enlisted under the Democratic banner. During the Civil war his sympathies were strongly with the South, and he sometimes indiscreetly uttered his sentiments. Lincoln said, "Blessed be God who giveth us the churches." No church was more loyal to the Union than the Methodist and none gave so many soldiers to its armies. This was probably Dean's chief reason for leaving it, for he freely condemned the church for "meddling in politics."

After "locating" in 1856, he made his home in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, but some time in the seventies he moved into northern Missouri, not far from Glenwood, settled on a large

*Born Oct. 27, 1822, Fayette county, Pa. J. R. Rippey, ANNALS OF IOWA, Vol. 8, No. 4, p. 241.



Your friend
Henry Clay Dean

From a photograph in Edgar R. Harlan's collection of The Van Buren
County Group of Famous Men

tract of land, and advertised his unreconstructed spirit by naming his place "Rebel's Cove." There his home and magnificent library were destroyed by fire, about 1885, and he died soon afterward.

I remember to have first seen Dean in 1860, and saw him at intervals thereafter for twenty years. He was short and stout, and became quite fleshy in his later years, had abundant black hair, deeply-set eyes, a very dark complexion, and a face that was rather heavy and coarse. When in repose there was nothing in his appearance to suggest to the ordinary observer that he was a very intellectual man and brilliant orator. He was further discounted by great carelessness as to his personal appearance, his apparel being habitually slouchy and not over-clean, on which account he was often spoken of as "dirty shirt Dean." In the course of a lecture, I once heard him say: "Alcibiades greatly diverted the people of Athens and set their tongues to wagging, by cutting off his dog's tail with a butcher's cleaver in the public market place. I have succeeded quite as well with my dirty shirt." When he left Iowa, it was erroneously supposed that he settled on the Missouri River, which moved an Iowa paper to say: "The two big muddies have formed a junction." In the summer of 1876, in Keosauqua, I heard him give a lecture on "The Old Senate," which was in reality a very able eulogy of Clay, Webster and Calhoun; and I well remember how astonished the people were when he came upon the platform clad in a new and clean linen suit.

He was exceedingly eccentric, a law unto himself, and had little respect for conventionalities. His sturdy physical make-up enabled him to ignore the laws of health with impunity for many years. He was always much more than a hearty eater. My wife relates that he was at her father's home one day for dinner, when her mother was absent, and she had to prepare the meal. Dean ate so heartily that she was afraid the table would be bare before his hunger was satisfied, and she was particularly dismayed because of the quantity of coffee he drank. I have just asked her, "How many cups of coffee did you say Dean drank at that meal, was it five or six?" and she replied, "O, more than that!" He must have

been sadly lacking in the qualities which make a minister a safe and inspiring example to his flock. And I really wonder that he was ever admitted to the ministry, and that he should have been acceptable to the people as long as he was. I know he was not acceptable to many. He was probably tolerated for two reasons: first, and chiefly, because of his commanding ability in the pulpit; and second, because he was a genius, and there are always quite a number of people who think that coarseness and negligence may be excused on the ground of genius, whereas the very opposite is true. An old saying is, "Nobility imposes obligations," and Jesus said, "Unto whomsoever much is given of him shall much be required." And Dean was not unmindful that precept and practice did not always harmonize in his case, for he would sometimes say when preaching: "Don't do as I do, do as I say."

In warm weather he would make a political speech in his shirt sleeves, his collar unbuttoned, one suspender slipped from his shoulder and hanging at his side, and perhaps one or both of his shoes untied. I saw him do so more than once, and in one such speech, delivered in the court house grove at Keosauqua, he paid one of the most glowing tributes to womanhood I ever heard; and a number who heard it spoke of the incongruity between the tribute and Dean's appearance as he uttered it.

I never heard him preach, but from credible witnesses often heard of his eccentricities in the pulpit. One of them heard him preach when apparently a tight shoe was hurting his foot. He endured it a little while, then, without pausing in his sermon, he took out his pocket knife, opened it, stooped over and cut a generous slit in the offending shoe. And one of our old preachers used to tell that he heard him making a wonderful prayer at a camp-meeting, under the influence of which it seemed that heaven and earth were coming together; that he was seized with a compelling desire to see how Dean looked while in such a supreme effort, and how dumbfounded he was, on lifting his head and opening his eyes, to behold the great man still praying mightily, and at the same time deliberately tying his shoe.

His great ability was generally conceded; he was himself well aware of it, and, like Ben Butler, was quite "willing to admit it." He once said to the late Charles Baldwin: "My mind is like a tar bucket, if anything gets into it, it sticks." And this was not a vain boast. His memory was truly wonderful. In proof of this Judge Knapp used to relate that he and Dean were associate counselors in the trial of a certain murder case, and that after the evidence had been taken, Dean sat up all night preparing his plea, writing it out in full. As they started to the court room in the morning, he said to Dean, "You are forgetting your manuscript," but Dean carelessly replied, "I don't need it." The Judge said that, in spite of having lost sleep the previous night, Dean made a great speech, and that, what was more remarkable still, it was almost, if not altogether, word for word as he had written it.

Landon Taylor, one of Iowa's pioneer preachers, in his book, "The Battlefield Reviewed," thus describes a sermon preached by Dean when at the height of his popularity:

. At one of our camp-meetings at Long Grove I was aware that he desired to preach on Sunday night. I said to him, "Henry, if you will preach a good gospel sermon tonight, and leave Dean out, we will be glad to hear you." True to his promise he started out and his naturally musical voice rose with the interest of the subject. He commenced with the sinner yet in his sins, and carried him through all the changes of spiritual progress, until he stood upon the Rock, with a new song in his mouth, even praises unto God. He then followed him through all the conflicts and experiences of human life, down to the day when he placed his foot upon the neck of his last enemy, and stood waving the flag of victory over the head of his conquered foe. Then with one sublime flight he brought him to the golden gates of the Heavenly city, where he was greeted with the songs of angels and the shouts of the saints, and Jesus placed a shining crown upon his head, and said to him, "You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things, enter into the joy of your Lord." But no pen sketch can give an accurate idea of the sermon and its effect upon the audience that clear and beautiful night.

I cannot now recall who told me, many years ago, of a sermon Dean preached at a camp-meeting near Burlington. His text was, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth," and in

his peroration he closed one thrilling flight of eloquence after another with the repetition of the text, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth!" and many of his hearers were so deeply moved that they rose to their feet and repeatedly exclaimed with him, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"

While he was pastor of the church at Keosauqua, one of Abner Kneeland's disciples was booked to come to the town and lecture against the Christian religion. Some of the saints began to fear for the safety of Zion. They consulted together and deputed Chandler Yeager and another brother to get Dean to answer the man. From Yeager's lips I heard the story. He said they found Dean eager for the battle. He began pacing the floor and saying, "I'll answer him. Yes, I'll answer him!" They said, "But you must keep still until he is through speaking." And Dean said, "I will, I will!" But to make sure that he did they went with him to the courthouse, and seated him on a short bench between them. Shortly after the lecturer began, Dean became indignant at something he said, and came sliding up against Yeager, who whispered to him, "Keep still!" and Dean said, "I will, I will!" But presently he became wrought up again and slid over to the other brother, who whispered, "Keep still!" and Dean again replied, "I will, I will!" He continued the sliding performance, but they held him in leash until the lecture closed, when he arose and asked the people to be seated again until he made a few announcements. They did so and before they were aware of it, he was fairly launched in a masterly reply which fully restored the confidence of the Christian people.

When another skeptic once challenged him to debate, he asked, "What do you want to debate about?" The man replied, "The immortality of the soul." Dean said, "I suppose you believe when you die that will be the end of you?" The man said "Yes," and brought down upon himself the retort, "Well then, why don't you go out there and get down on all fours, and root around in the mud with your brother hogs?" Saying which, Dean turned and walked away, leaving the skeptic feeling that he had enough to reflect on for awhile.

He delighted in doing startling things. Here in Keosauqua one Burton kept a saloon, and Dean held forth on the subject of temperance in a Sunday service, and in the course of his prayer he cried out, "O Lord, save the people, but kill Burton."

In those days he was a Whig and hated slavery. On a Saturday, during a term of court, he sauntered into the law office of Knapp, Wright and Caldwell, where quite a number of the transient lawyers were assembled in order to consult the firm's fine library, and among them were such Democrats as Trimble, Hendershott and Williams. After an introduction and a little chatting, Dean took Caldwell aside and said to him, "I am going to preach on the subject of slavery tomorrow, and I want you to get these men to come and hear me." Caldwell induced them to do so, but without betraying Dean's purpose, and they were shown to seats well up in front. In relating the story to me, a few years ago, Judge Caldwell said: "Dean was at his best, and I never, in all my life, heard such a scathing denunciation of slavery. After the service, as I was passing down the aisle, I felt some one pluck me by the sleeve and when I turned about I saw that it was Dean. He leaned toward me and said in a whisper, "Caldwell, didn't I give them hell?"

Before surrendering his ordination papers he once came to Keosauqua, stayed over Sunday and preached, but the moment the service ended, he stepped down from the pulpit, shook hands with an old friend and said, "Do you know of any cheap land for sale?" And it was about that time that he said to Rev. I. P. Teter, "Everything has now resolved itself into a question of dollars and cents with me."

As I have already said, I never heard Dean preach. My first recollection of him dates back to the memorable presidential campaign of 1860. He was making a political speech outdoors in Keosauqua, and was then an ardent advocate of Democracy. On the outskirts of the crowd one of the tall Langfords stood, leaning against a young apple tree, with his head among the branches, and, while Dean was scoring Lincoln and his party, Langford called out, "Here's six feet

four for Lincoln!" and he afterward made his words good by serving three years in the Union army, suffering both wounds and long imprisonment. Also among the hearers of that speech was County Judge Emanuel Mayne, afterward a captain in the 3rd Iowa cavalry, and killed in a skirmish at Kirksville, Mo. While warmly eulogizing his party, Dean exclaimed, "Whoever heard of the Democratic party squandering public funds?" "I did," said Judge Mayne. Dean asked, "When was it?" Mayne replied, "When the United States Senate hired Henry Clay Lean to pray for it." Dean retorted, "Well, I never prayed for you, and I never will, for I don't believe in praying for dumb brutes."

A year or two after that, he had a date for another speech here, but he failed to fill it, because he had been thrown into the guard-house at Keokuk for alleged treasonable utterances in a speech at that place. At the same time some soldiers were confined in the guard-house, for "conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline." They organized a court-martial, tried Dean for treason, found him guilty, sentenced him to death, and they even went so far as to make a rope of their suspenders and put a noose about his neck. The report reached us that they had him badly scared, and there was some reason for his being so, because some of the men were drunk almost to the irresponsible degree. The authorities turned him loose in a day or two, thinking he had been punished enough, and had learned a valuable lesson.

Sometimes the laugh was on Dean, and from entirely unexpected sources. There was a certain Thomas Howard, who had been a very bright young man, and was said to have "stumped Ohio in company with famous Tom Corwin," but he contracted habits of dissipation, as the result of which he became very poor and suffered a partial loss of speech. Finally good old Dr. Elbert brought him to Iowa, and gave him a little home on his farm, about four miles west of Keosauqua, where he eked out a living, generally by doing day labor as he was able, and sometimes teaching a small country school, but his appetite for liquor occasionally got the upper hand of him, and in the end he committed suicide. One day he was coming to town on foot, when Dean over-

took him in a buggy, pulled up his team, and the following colloquy took place between them. It was the more ludicrous because of Howard's low estate and limping utterance:

Dean: "Hello, Howard. Going to town?"

Howard: "Hello, Dean. Yes, I'm going to town."

Dean: "So am I, get in and ride."

Howard: "Well, Dean, I would, but I was elected sub-director of my school district the other day, and my constituents are a little particular about the company I keep."

Dean drove on into town, relishing the joke so well that he told it to some friends before Howard arrived.

Again, in the political campaign of 1868, Dean made a series of stump speeches in Vermont, and at one place, after scoring the Republican party to his own great satisfaction, he asked, "Is there a Republican here?" A very plain-looking old farmer arose and said, "I am a Republican, Mr. Dean." This was unexpected; Dean eyed the man quizzically for a moment, and then said, "Well, how do you feel?" The old farmer promptly replied, "I feel just like a sound apple in a bushel of rotten ones."

In 1876 I heard Dean lecture before the literary societies of the college at Mt. Pleasant. It was during commencement week, and the members of the societies were anxious to have the affair staged in good style. They proposed to have all the officers of the societies seated on the platform, and Dean introduced by one of the presidents, but he said, "I live here, and the people know me; I don't need an introduction, and don't want any other preliminaries. Leave the whole affair to me; I'll be there on time and will introduce myself."

When the hour came, the large hall was full of people, but not a soul was on the platform. Suddenly Dean entered at a side door and, amid much cheering and hand-clapping, strode upon the stage, where, without pausing a step, he took off his slouch hat and sailed it several feet away into a chair, turned to the audience and, without a formal bow or even a nod of his head, began by saying: "Some one has said that a public speaker should have something to say, and say it

boldly, not caring whether his hearers agreed with him or not. And that is exactly my mood today." Then, after extolling our free school system, he made an attack upon the existing State aid, control and management of institutions of higher learning. He objected to the State University at Iowa City on the ground that it gave free tuition to only two students from each county in a given period, which meant favoritism, was unjust because all citizens of the State were taxed for the sole benefit of a few, and was contrary to the sound Jeffersonian doctrine that legislation should always aim to secure the greatest good of the greatest number. Then, having disposed of the State University, he said, "And now we have at Ames an *Ag-ri-cul-tu-ral College!*" The reader will have to imagine, for I cannot describe, the sneering way in which he drawled out the word, with a prolonged emphasis on each syllable, each time he had occasion to use the name of the institution.

After showing that it was also open to the same objection he had urged against the State University, he indicted it for hypocrisy, in that it was not specifically an agricultural school as it professed to be, and its name implied, but was an ordinary college with agriculture added to the course of studies; and that the State did not obligate the students to follow farming after graduating; that the students themselves had no intention of becoming farmers, but went to Ames solely to obtain a general education, as a preparation for some other calling than farming; therefore the State, the regents, faculty and students were all hypocrites. Then, turning to the owner of a large farm, he said, "Col. Greisel, how many of these fine-haired young men from the *ag-ri-cul-tu-ral* college have come down here to work for you on your farm?"

While inveighing against the impractical character of some things taught, he gave some account of a lecture which he heard in Washington City, in which a scientist taught that the planetary system was cooling down, and would ultimately become a system of ice-bound worlds. "Then, I thought," said Dean (alluding to a well known Methodist Boanerges), "Come on, Mike See, with your hell-fire and brimstone."

At this sally there was much laughter, and Dean himself swaggered back and leaned against the wall, folded his arms across his breast, and laughed heartily. Then, stepping forward, he addressed Rev. W. F. Evans, saying, "Frank, where is Mike, anyhow?" Dean was not at his best in this lecture, perhaps because he had a bad case. The lecture was very entertaining, and to some extent instructive, but by no means convincing.

In 1880 my wife and I were on a train in Missouri, when Dean came into our car, and walked leisurely down the aisle, stopping frequently to talk with acquaintances, and we were surprised that he knew so many people. I had never been introduced to him, and my wife had not met him for years, probably not since she was the mere girl who, at one meal, had poured more than five or six cups of coffee for him, but she said, "When he comes along here, I am going to see if he knows me." Accordingly, as he was about to pass by, she arose, extended her hand and said, "Mr. Dean, do you know me?" He instantly replied, "Why, yes! You're Charley Baldwin's daughter," and, after being introduced to me, we had a very interesting talk with him. The car was not crowded, and the two ladies just in front of us offered to move so that he might sit down, but he said, "No, no, ladies, I thank you, but keep your seats. If you ever become as fleshy as I am, and I hope you may not, you will find it more comfortable, much of the time, to stand than to sit."

When asked about his health he said, "Oh, it is only fairly good, but I never have a doctor and never take any medicine. When I don't feel well, I just take a little cream-of-tartar, that cools the blood." When the train boy came along and presented his tray of peanuts, Dean frowned and said, "No, peanuts are for pigs!"

Although he had withdrawn from the church nearly twenty years before, he still retained a general faith in the Christian religion, and in the course of our conversation he said, "I am going down to Columbia to lecture before the literary societies of the State University. The subject of my lecture is, 'Objections to Ingersolism.' I have ten objections to Ingersol-

ism, and they are the Ten Commandments." He said no more about it, but left us to infer that his argument, put in propositional form, would be, "Resolved, that the well-being of humanity cannot be conserved, in the highest sense, without the religion and morality of the Decalogue."

In the fall of 1881, I met Dean for the last time, when we were the only passengers in the caboose of a night freight train, between Bloomfield and Ottumwa. About that time Dr. H. W. Thomas, of the Rock River Conference, in Illinois, was on trial for heresy. He had formerly been a member of the Iowa Conference, of which I was then a member, and I was slightly acquainted with him, while Dean had known him long and well. So we discussed the case with much interest, and I was both surprised and gratified that his views agreed with mine. He said he had recently seen Thomas in Chicago, and said to him, "Hiram, you are wrong. Of course, generally speaking, you have a right to abide by your own personal convictions, and to preach the same, but not while you belong to the church and are a Methodist preacher. The only right and honorable thing for you to have done was to give up your parchments and withdraw from the church when you found that you were not in harmony with it. Years ago, when I could not approve of what the church was doing, I frankly told the brethren so, and asked the privilege of withdrawing from the church, which they kindly allowed. So there was no friction, no hard feeling, and our relations have been friendly ever since. I have great respect for the Methodist Church, and many of its members and preachers I count among my best friends." And I am indeed glad that, when I had my last interview with Dean, he was in such a judicial frame of mind, having charity for all. Perhaps he was experiencing the mellowing effect of old age.

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